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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000461

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DEPT. FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TALABANI GOES TO ANKARA: A BREAKTHROUGH VISIT

REF: ANKARA 436 AND PREVIOUS

ANKARA 00000461 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's March 7-8 visit to Ankara, hailed by President Gul as the first ever by a democratically-elected Iraqi head of state to Turkey, should help to repair bilateral relations. It is remarkable for having occurred only one week after the return of Turkish land forces from northern Iraq following a one-week incursion against PKK targets there. Next steps include following up on the talks here and initiating direct Turkey/Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) discussions that may be planned for coming days. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Talabani held one-on-one meetings with both President Gul and PM Erdogan, which MFA U/S Apakan described to us as "frank and candid." Apakan predicted that this would result in more and better communications between the two countries on a range of issues. Ministers responsible for security, energy, trade, and water participated and held side meetings. According to Apakan, they discussed:

-- cooperation on counter-terrorism, including a follow-on visit by Iraqi Interior Minister Bolani (who did not accompany Talabani);

-- finalizing a Turkey-proposed bilateral economic cooperation agreement;

-- the development of Iraq's petroleum/gas resources and their transit to and through Turkey to European markets (including via Nabucco); and

-- water issues, including the possible establishment of a bilateral institute or mechanism to discuss water/irrigation that would be organized alongside existing Turkey-Iraq-Syria water cooperation arrangements.

Representatives of the Turkish military were notably absent

from the events.

13. (U) Public remarks by Talabani, Gul, and Erdogan stressed a desire for closer relations. Gul said that he and Talabani share a common vision. "We would like to see a prosperous Iraq which has achieved national consensus and is at peace with its neighbors. When the full potential between Iraq and Turkey is achieved, you will see a relationship that is exemplary for neighbors and that will contribute to stability and cooperation throughout the region." Erdogan underscored the significance of Talabani's visit for improving ties. He called for raising bilateral trade from the current level of \$3 billion per year to \$10-25 billion in the future. Talabani highlighted his desire for a "strategic relationship." While stressing that Iraq wants the PKK either to lay down its arms or abandon its bases on Iraqi territory, Talabani stated that the PKK threat to Turkey can never be eliminated through military means alone. He called for closer cooperation to determine the best way to establish a comprehensive plan to end the terrorist threat.

14. (C) Talabani also told the press here that KRG President Barzani wants to establish closer relations with Turkey, as well. Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) official and Barzani foreign policy adviser (and former KDP Ankara representative) Safeen Dizayee accompanied Talabani. He told Ambassador that discussions continue about a Turkey/KRG meeting. Venue and timing are still uncertain, but it appears that one possibility is for a Turkish delegation to meet in Erbil with KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani on the margins of the March 11-13 Arab Parliamentary Summit. GOT officials can be expected to press the KRG to take additional steps to limit the PKK's ability to operate in northern Iraq, including through the arrest and extradition of PKK leaders, issues Gul made clear publicly are priorities for Turkey.

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15. (C) COMMENT: Talabani's visit to Ankara is notable for the fact that it occurred at all - one week after Turkish forces left northern Iraq and after years of refusal by former President Sezer to permit Talabani to come. GOT Iraq Coordinator Murat Ozcelik has long told us that getting Talabani here would be the essential icebreaker before his government could deal with the KRG. While there remains a great deal of mistrust here over purported ties among Iraqi Kurd leaders with the PKK, those who support engagement with Iraq and with Erbil on the PKK and to develop relations more broadly appear to have gained the upper hand. The fact of Talabani's visit probably also strengthens the hand of the AKP and moderates here over Kurdish nationalist hotheads whose declining traction politically can only be a good thing.

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WILSON